

WHAT CONGRESS AND GANDHI HAVE DONE TO THE UNTOUCHABLES

"It may be your interest to be our masters, but how can it be ours to be your
slaves ? "

—THUCYDIDES.

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WHAT CONGRESS AND GANDHI HAVE DONE TO THE UNTOUCHABLES

Dedication

(11) And Naomi said, Turn again, my Daughters; why will ye go with me ?
(12) go your way. . . (14) And they lifted up their voice, and weft again, and
Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her, (15) And she said.
Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods ;
return thou after thy sister-in-law. (16) And Ruth said. Intreat me not to leave
them; or to return from following after thee ; for whither thou goest, I will go;
and where thou lodgest, I will lodge ; thy people shall be my people, and thy
God my God. (17) Where thou diest, will I die, and there will be buried; the
LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me"

I know how, when we used to read the Bible together, you would be affected

by the sweetness and pathos of this passage. While you will be glad to read it again you will, I am sure, ask me what made me recall it in this connection. I wonder if you remember the occasion when we fell into discussion about the value of Ruth's statement "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." I have a clear memory of it and can well recall our difference of opinion, You maintained that its value lay in giving expression to the true sentiments appropriate to a perfect wife. I put forth the view that the passage had a sociological value and its true interpretation was the one given by Prof. Smith, namely, that it helped to distinguish modern society from ancient society. Ruth's statement " Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God" defined ancient society by its most dominant characteristic namely that it was a society of man plus God while modern society is a society of men only (pray remember that in men I include women also). My view was not then acceptable to you. But you were interested enough to urge me to write a book on this theme. I promised to do so. For as an oriental I belong to a society which is still ancient and in which God is a much more important member than man is. The part of the conversation which is important to me at this stage is the promise I then made to dedicate the book to you if I succeeded in writing one. Prof. Smith's interpretation had opened a new vista before me and I had every hope of carrying out my intention. The chances of developing the theme in a book form are now very remote. As you know, I am drawn in the vortex of politics which leaves no time for literary pursuits. I do not know when I shall be out of it. The feeling of failure to fulfil my promise has haunted me ever since the war started. Equally distressing was the fear that you might pass away as a war casualty and not be there to receive if I were to have time to complete it. But the unexpected has happened. There you are, out of the throes of Death. Here is a book ready awaiting dedication. This happy conjunction of two such events has suggested to me the idea that rather than postpone it indefinitely I might redeem my word, by dedicating this book which I have succeeded in bringing to completion. Though different in theme it is not an unworthy substitute. Will you accept it ?

B. R. A.

To,

F.

In Thy Presence is the Fullness of Joy.

PREFACE

"In 1892, there took place in England a new election to Parliament, in which the Conservatives headed by Lord Salisbury lost and the Liberals headed by

Mr. Gladstone won. The remarkable thing about this election was that notwithstanding the defeat of his party at the polls. Lord Salisbury—contrary to Parliamentary convention—refused to surrender his office to the leader of the Liberal Party. When Parliament assembled, the Queen delivered the usual gracious speech from the throne containing the legislative programme of Lord Salisbury's Government and the usual address to Her Majesty was moved from the Government side. Lord Salisbury's Government was an illegitimate Government. It was a challenge to the fundamental principle of the British Constitution, which recognised parliamentary Majority as the only title deed for a Party's right to form a Government. The Liberals took up the challenge and tabled an amendment to the address. The amendment sought to condemn Lord Salisbury's Government for its insistence on continuing in office, notwithstanding the fact that it had no majority behind it. The task of moving the amendment was entrusted to the late Lord (then Mr.) Asquith. In his speech in support of the amendment, Mr. Asquith used the now famous phrase—"Causa finita est: Roma locuta est." (Rome has spoken and the dispute must end). The phrase was originally used by St. Augustine but in a different context. It was used in the course of a religious controversy and had come to be used as a foundation for Papal Sovereignty. Mr. Asquith used it as a political maxim embodying the basic principle of Parliamentary Democracy. Today it is accepted as the fundamental principle on which Popular Government rests, namely, the Right of a Political Majority to Rule. It told instantaneously against Salisbury's Government and must tell against all parties who fail at the polls wherever Parliamentary Democracy is in operation.

I was reminded of this maxim when the results of the Elections to the Provincial Legislatures in India, which took place in February 1987 under the Government of India Act, 1985, were announced. Congressmen did not actually say "Causa finita est : India locuta est." But so far as the parties, which had opposed the Congress in the Elections, were concerned, that is what the results of the Elections seemed, to proclaim. Having led the Untouchables against the Congress for full five years in the Round Table Conference and in the Joint Parliamentary Committee, I could not pretend to be unaffected by the results of the Elections. To me the question was: Had the Untouchables gone over to the Congress ? Such a thing was to me unimaginable. For, I could not believe that the Untouchables—apart from a few agents of the Congress who are always tempted by the Congress gold to play the part of the traitor—could think of going over to the Congress en masse forgetting how Mr. Gandhi and the Congress opposed, inch by inch up to the very last moment, every one of their demands for political safeguards. I

had therefore decided to study the Returns of the election that took place in 1937. .

While I was convinced that such a study was of great necessity from the point of view of the Untouchables, the work proceeded at a snail's pace. This was due to three causes. The work had to be kept aside for some time to give precedence to other literary projects, the urgency of which demanded a degree of priority which it was not possible to refuse. Secondly, the Blue Book on the Election Results of 1937, which was submitted to Parliament soon after the elections had taken place and which is the primary source for figures regarding the elections, proved inadequate and insufficient for my purpose. It does not give separately figures showing how the Scheduled Castes electors voted and how many votes the Scheduled Caste candidates got. It gives figures showing how electors in different constituencies voted, without making any distinction between Hindu voters and the Scheduled Castes voters. Circular letters had therefore to be issued to the various Provincial Governments requesting them to send me the figures showing distribution of voting by Scheduled Caste electors and the number of votes secured by each Scheduled Caste candidate. This inevitably delayed the work.. Thirdly, the examination of these election returns proved a very laborious task as the statistical tables given In the Appendices to this book will show.

The work thus lingered on. I regret very much this delay. For I know how much mischief has been done by the Congress during the interval. The Congress has advertised the election results to bolster up its claim to represent the Untouchables. The main point in the advertisement is that out of 151 seats assigned to the Scheduled Castes the Independent Labour Party which was organised by me got only 12 seats and the rest of the seats were captured by the Congress. This mess is served out from the Congress kitchen as conclusive proof to show that the Congress represents the Untouchables. This false propaganda seems to have gone home in some quarters. Even a man like Mr. H. N. Brailsford has reproduced in his 'Subject India' this absurd Congress version, without any attempt at verification and with apparent acceptance of its truth. I am sure that the results of the elections as set out in this book will hit the nail squarely on the head of this false propaganda. For, the Congress version of the results of the election is an utter perversion. As a matter of fact the results of 1937 Election conclusively disprove the Congress claim to represent the Untouchables. Far from supporting the Congress version the results of the Election show : (1) that out of 151 the Congress got only 78 seats; (2) that the Untouchables in almost every constituency fought against the Congress by putting up their own candidates; (3) that the majority of 78 seats won by the Congress were won with the help of Hindu votes and

they do not therefore in any way represent the Scheduled Castes ; and (4.) that of 151 seats those won by the Congress in the real sense i.e., with the majority of votes of the Scheduled Castes, were only 88. As to the Independent Labour Party it was started in 1937 just a few months before the elections. It functioned only in the Province of Bombay. There was no time to organise branches in other Provinces. Elections on the ticket of the Independent Labour Party were fought only in the Province of Bombay and there the Independent Labour Party far from being a failure obtained an astonishing degree of success. Out of the 15 seats assigned to the Scheduled Castes in Bombay Presidency it captured 18 and in addition it won 2 general seats. I am therefore glad that at long last I have succeeded in completing the work which proves beyond the shadow of doubt that the story that the Congress captured all the seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes and that the Independent Labour Party was a failure, is a wicked lie. I trust that the book will prove interesting and instructive for all those who are interested in the subject and who desire to know the truth.

Before closing this preface, I wish to express my gratitude to those from whom I have received assistance in one form or another. I am grateful to the Provincial Governments for the troubles they have taken in responding to my circular and sending me additional facts and figures which I had called for. My thanks are also due to Mr. Karan Singh Kane, B.A., M.L.A., at one time, Parliamentary Secretary in the U. P. Congress Government, for the help he has rendered in the most laborious task of preparing the tables."

The reader who reads the above preface and compares it with the table of contents will at once find that the book deals with topics which lie far outside its boundary. The curious may like to know how the foregoing part of the preface is related to the table of contents. The explanation lies in the fact that the book in its present final form is quite different from what it was in its original form. In its original form it covered in very brief compass matter now dealt with on a vastly bigger scale in Chapters IV, V, VI, VII and IX and the statistical appendices. The foregoing part of the preface belonged to the book in its original form. That is why I have put it in inverted commas. The curious may also like to know why the final form of the book came to be so different from the original. The explanation is quite simple. The proofs of the book in its original form were seen by a friend and co-worker. He was dissatisfied with the scope of the book and insisted that it is not enough to deal with election results to expose the Congress claim to represent the Untouchables, I must do more. I must expose the efforts of the Congress and Mr. Gandhi to improve the lot of the Untouchables for the information of the Untouchables and also of the foreigners whom the Congress had deluded into accepting its

side by misrepresentation of facts. Besides the difficulties arising out of the fact that the book was already in proof form, this was a tall order and appeared to be beyond me having regard to other claims on my time. He would not, however, give way and I had therefore to accept his plan. The original work which would have been about 75 pages in print had to be completely recast and enlarged. The book in the present form is a complete transformation. It records the deeds of the Congress and Mr. Gandhi from 1917 to date in so far as they touch the problem of the Untouchables. Much is written about the Congress, far more about Mr. Gandhi. But no one has so far told the story of what they have done about the Untouchables. Everyone knows that Mr. Gandhi values more his reputation as the saviour of the Untouchables than his reputation as the champion of Swaraj or as the protagonist of Akimsa. At the Round Table Conference he claimed to be the sole champion of the Untouchables and was not even prepared to share the honour with anyone else, I remember what a scene he created when his claim was contested. Mr. Gandhi does not merely claim for himself the championship of the Untouchables. He claims similar championship for the Congress. The Congress, he says, is fully pledged to redress the wrongs done to the Untouchables and argues that any attempt to give political safeguards to the Untouchables is unnecessary and harmful. It is therefore a great pity that no detailed study of these claims by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress has been undertaken so far.

With the Hindus who have been blind devotees of Mr. Gandhi this study, although it is the first of its kind, will not find favour: indeed it is sure to provoke their wrath. How can it be otherwise when the conclusion arrived at is "Beware of Mr. Gandhi"? Looking at it from a wider point of view, there is no reason for the Hindus to be enraged about it. The Untouchables are not the only community in India which thinks of Mr. Gandhi in these terms. The same view of Mr. Gandhi is entertained by the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Indian Christians. As a matter of fact, the Hindus should cogitate over the question and ask: why no community trusts Mr. Gandhi although he has been saying that he is the friend of the Muslims, Sikhs and the Scheduled Castes and what is the reason for this distrust? In my judgment, there cannot be a greater tragedy for a leader to be distrusted by everybody as Mr. Gandhi is today. I am however certain that this is not how the Hindus will react. As usual, they will denounce the book and call me names. But as the proverb says: "The caravan must pass on, though the dogs bark." In the same way, I must do my duty, no matter what my adversaries may have to say. For as Voltaire observed: Who writes the history of his own time must expect to be attacked for everything he has said, and for everything he has not said: but

these little drawbacks should not discourage a man who loves truth and liberty, expects nothing, fears nothing, asks nothing and limits his ambition to the cultivation of letters."

The book has become bulky. It may be said that it suffers by reason of over-elaboration and even by repetition. I am aware of this. But I have written the book especially for the Untouchables and for the foreigners. On behalf of neither could I presume knowledge of the relevant facts. For the particular audience I have in view, it is necessary for me to state both facts as well as arguments and pay no regard to the artistic sense or the fastidious taste of a cultivated and informed class of readers.

As it is my intention to make the book a complete compendium of information regarding the movement of the Untouchables for political safeguards, I have added several appendices other than those of statistical character. They contain relevant documents both official and non-official which have a bearing upon the movement. Those who are interested in the problem of the Untouchables will, I believe, be glad to have this information ready at hand. The general reader may complain that the material in the Appendices is much too much. Here again, I must state that the Untouchables are not likely to get the information which to the general reader may be easily accessible. The test adopted is the need of the Untouchables and not of the general reader.

One last word. The reader will find that I have used quite promiscuously in the course of this book a variety of nomenclature such as Depressed Classes, Scheduled Castes, Harijans and Servile Classes to designate the Untouchables. I am aware that this is likely to cause confusion especially for those who are not familiar with conditions in India. Nothing could have pleased me better than to have used one uniform nomenclature. The fault is not altogether mine. All these names have been used officially and unofficially at one time or other for the Untouchables. The term under the Government of India Act is 'Scheduled Castes.' But that came into use after 1985. Before that they were called 'Harijans' by Mr. Gandhi and 'Depressed Classes' by Government. In a flowing situation like that it is not possible to fix upon one name, which may be correct designation at one stage and incorrect at another. The reader will overcome all difficulties if he will remember that these terms are synonyms and represent the same class.

I am grateful to Professor Manohar Chitnis for the preparation of the Index and to Mr. S. C. Joshi for help in correcting the proofs.

B. R. AMBEDKAR.

24th June 1945.
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New Delhi.

Chapter I